GET YOURSELF TALKING ABOUT SEXUAL HEALTH

MEDIA: THE OTHER SEXUAL HEALTH MESSENGER

WHERE ARE KIDS RECEIVING INFORMATION ABOUT SEXUALITY?

- Television/movies
- Internet (through computers, tablets, and cell phones)
- Other media: radio/podcasts, magazines, books, pornography

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS?

- Interactivity among all kinds of people and groups has increased explosively via the Internet. Social networking sites, texting, and e-mail allow children and teens to engage in instantaneous and unsupervised communication that is not always positive and at times, potentially dangerous
- Because there are multiple contributors to the Internet, information children and teens obtain, including health information, may or may not be accurate
- Researchers don't yet know how much and in what ways the information, images, and messages kids obtain through media and the Internet affect how they think and what they do. But, we do know that media portrayals often promote unhealthy values and behaviors.

EXTRA RESOURCES

Here are some Web sites that can help you and your child learn to manage the Internet safely and respectfully:

- Childnet International: www.childnet-int.org
- Connect Safely: www.connectsafely.org
- CyberSMART: www.cybersmart.org
- Family Online Safety Institute: www.fosi.org
- FilterReview: www.filterreview.com
- SafeKids: www.safekids.com/kidsrules.htm

Directions: Cut along the outside edge and fold at the crease to make your bookmark. Use as a guide for talking with your child about sexual health topics.

VIEWING TOGETHER

Viewing, reading, and listening to media together and discussing content, especially with younger children, can help kids be more critical about what they see on TV and in other media. It can help them distinguish what's appropriate and **inappropriate to apply to their lives.** Here are some discussion questions to get started:

"What do you think of (character or situation)?"

"That scene reminded me of when..."

"What do you think (character) should have done?"

"Which characters do you most and least admire? Why?"

*Allow your child to freely express what he/she thinks. There are no right or wrong answers, unless it comes to misinformation about facts.

CREATING A SAFE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Everyone wants children to be safe when using the Internet. Here are some sensible rules to create and enforce:

Set up rules for computer and Internet use with your child which you and he/she can negotiate as he/she gets older. Cookies and site blocks can be employed, especially when children are young, but at older ages, **conversation is more important.**

In regard to social networking sites, encourage your child to be mindful of what he/she and others post on the Internet about him/herself. He/she needs to understand that information shared online cannot be considered **private. What he/she posts can** easily fall into the hands of people who might use the information against him/her, ranging from cyber-bullies to sexual predators.

Explain to your child that fair, kind, and respectful treatment of others is a principle you expect him/her to live by whenever he/she is communicating in the real world or the cyber world.

Talk with your child about setting up passwords, avoiding suspicious sites and e-mails, and respecting "firewalls" that are designed by Web sites to protect everyone's sensitive, personal data.

STD Awareness

MARYLAND
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene